

**Testimony On Behalf Of The
Connecticut Regional Office of the
Anti-Defamation League**

**IN OPPOSITION TO
BILL NO. 1014
AN ACT CONCERNING THE ELECTRONIC
CORRESPONDENCE OF STUDENTS**

March 9, 2009

The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) was founded in 1913 with a mandate to fight the defamation of the Jewish people and secure justice and fair treatment for all. Today the ADL is one of the country's leading civil rights and human services organizations. The Connecticut Regional Office of ADL is based in Hamden and serves the entire state of Connecticut.

We submit this testimony today to express our opposition to Bill 1014, An Act Concerning the Electronic Correspondence of Students. We are strong proponents of the First Amendment, and believe that free speech and expression in a vigorous marketplace of ideas should be promoted and encouraged. We recognize, as the Supreme Court has held, that this freedom extends to students in many circumstances, where such speech or expression does not disrupt the educational process.

For the current generation of teens, e-mailing, text messaging, chatting and blogging are a central part of their social lives. There are increasing reports however, that many are misusing the Internet and cell phone technology to bully and harass others. Throughout the country, many school administrators are now dealing with the issue of cyberbullying in their schools.

In a recent survey of 13- to 17-year-olds, 35% reported being targeted by Internet harassment including rude or nasty comments, rumors, and threatening or aggressive messages during the preceding year. Eight percent reported frequent harassment, being targeted monthly or more often. In a survey of middle school students from a large U.S. school district, students who reported being cyberbullied said that the bully was most often someone from school. Not all acts of cyberbullying rise to the level of a threat, but the vast majority of these acts affect the school environment.

Over the past several years, it has become clear that new technologies have enabled bullying to take a new and ubiquitous form in cyberspace. Cyberbullying may be even more harmful than traditional bullying because of the invasive and pervasive nature of the communication. In ADL's A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE® Institute educational programs, which reach approximately 12,000 students a year in Connecticut, we have learned that the far-reaching impact of cyberbullying transcends the transmission of a particular message or posting of a particular photo or video online. It reaches students wherever they go, including school and school-sponsored activities. Messages are circulated far and wide and there is no refuge. While a communication may be transmitted on a personal computer after school hours, it is often

forwarded broadly to other students, or printed out and brought in to school. In our experience, such activity, even when initiated off school grounds and using personal equipment, can have a significant effect on students, teachers, the school environment and the educational process.

We recognize that each case is different and that, in many circumstances, schools may not have the jurisdiction to discipline students for electronic communications that take place outside of school. However, it is critical that schools have the necessary tools available to them and discretion to address cyberbullying off school grounds that may not rise to the level of a "threat" but disrupts the educational process and affects the school community. Bill 1014's attempt to limit schools in this important area will hinder efforts to combat and respond to cyberbullying.

We urge you to oppose Bill 1014, which would take away schools' ability to address cyberbullying that directly impacts the learning environment, and which proposes a seemingly simple solution to a complicated and complex issue.